

## **Sermon Guides for Ruth – 2 Chronicles (Lent 2020)**

**Series Title:** The Cross-Shaped Life

**Tag Line:** Lessons on Holy Character

**Dates (2020):** March 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, April 5, 12

**Key Verse:**

“God doesn’t look at things like humans do. Humans see only what is visible to the eyes, but the Lord sees into the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7)

### **Series Overview**

The stories of Ruth, Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles depict the rise and fall of the Israelite monarchy. The Israelites transition from a confederacy of tribes in Joshua and Judges to a unified nation under a single king. A mere 120 years later, that united monarchy suffers irreparable schism, based on theological and political division.

At the heart of these stories are people whose positive and negative examples teach us a great deal about holy character, including loyalty, attentiveness, wisdom, hope, and obedience. The spiritual journey of the Israelite people will be our guide along our own pathway to godly living.

Even though these are stories from the Hebrew Bible, they will still offer relevant lessons for Christian people during this holy season of preparation. Lent is a time of letting go of our sinful ways so that God could lead us in the way of holiness, obedience, and surrender. In Christ, that path leads to the cross, the ultimate example of self-giving love and holy character.

### **Colors, Images, Mood, Vibe**

Purple (Lenten and royal color); Yellow (holiness); White (Purity, hope).

Images of prayer, open hands, outstretched arms.

Feelings of repentance, obedience, surrender.

## Sermon 1

**Title:** Where You Go, I Will Go

**Scripture:** Ruth 1:6-22

**Key Word:** Loyalty

**Theme:** Ruth and Naomi

**Main Idea:** God calls us to live in love and support of one another, especially when times get tough.

### Sermon Description:

The story of Ruth is unlike many other stories of the Bible thus far. Preceding books are filled with acts of deceit, revenge, and the use of violence to demonstrate a commitment to God. Ruth, on the other hand, does not contain a single bit of violence or family dysfunction. Instead, the book exemplifies an important aspect of holy character: loyalty and fidelity to God and to each other.

The story begins with Naomi's hardship, as her husband and two sons have died. She puts the needs of others before her own, graciously releasing her daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, to care for their own needs and chart their own future, rather than worry about her.

But rather than leave Orpah behind, Ruth chooses the harder path, the one of loyalty and love. In a culture that often pressures us to seek our own needs over those of others, and would tempt us to disregard those who are hurting and suffering, Ruth shows us the power of self-giving love. It is the same love that Jesus would demonstrate on the cross.

## Sermon 2

**Title:** Here Am I

**Scripture:** 1 Samuel 3:1-21

**Key Word:** Attentiveness

**Theme:** The Call of Samuel

**Main Idea:** We can hear God's voice with the guidance of others; we are called to serve as guides for others as well.

### **Sermon Description:**

The story of the call of Samuel would remind us that God is always speaking to us. There may be times when God seems absent or distant, when in fact God is offering us words of encouragement, challenge, and direction. Our inability to hear God is sometimes due to trying to listen for God alone.

Samuel needed the companionship and confirmation of Eli in order to perceive and understand the message of God. We should surround ourselves with trusted loved ones and spiritual guides who can serve the same role for us. Likewise, we may be an Eli for someone else. We can help others—particularly young people and new Christians—discern the path that God is calling them to follow.

## Sermon 3

**Title:** God Looks at the Heart

**Scripture:** 1 Samuel 16:1-13

**Key Word:** Character

**Theme:** The Rise and Fall of Saul; the Anointing of David

**Main Idea:** Right actions and behavior is important, but it is not enough. It must be also be governed by holy motivation.

### Sermon Description:

The first two kings of Israel provide us a striking contrast in behavior and motivation. In Saul, we find a charismatic leader whose outward appearance checked of all the popular boxes in what a heroic king should look like. In David, we see an overlooked, underqualified shepherd who would be the last choice for king.

The calling and anointing of David remind us of the importance of character, and the purity of our motivations. While we might know how important it is to do the right things and behave the way we should, it's even more important to act out of the best motivations.

As Samuel tells Jesse, God can see past the outward appearance and look at the heart. It is easy to wear masks, disguising our inner motivations from others. We might appear to do the right things on the outside. But our hearts must be pure, motivated out of a full devoted love for God and others.

## Sermon 4

**Title:** An Understanding Mind

**Scripture:** 1 Kings 3:1-15

**Key Word:** Wisdom

**Theme:** Solomon

**Main Idea:** Sound leadership is so needed today. It begins with an appeal to God for wisdom.

### **Sermon Description:**

With the transition from David to Solomon, we hear one of the most poignant and instructive prayers uttered in the Hebrew Bible. Solomon prays to God for an understanding mind, that he might govern God's people and discern the difference between right and wrong. It includes a genuine admission: Who can govern God's great people?

Solomon's prayer is a reminder of the importance of sound leadership. Without it, systems and groups of people are too prone to cause harm and chaos rather than harmony and peace. With it, people can flourish, and bring about positive change for the benefit of all people.

What might it look like for us to pray a similar prayer during this Lenten season? What areas of life beckon us to ask God for a discerning mind, to know the difference between right and wrong?

## Sermon 5

**Title:** A Still, Small Voice

**Scripture:** 1 Kings 19:1-8

**Key Word:** Hope

**Theme:** Elijah and Elisha

**Main Idea:** God gives us just enough of what we need to take it one day at a time. We are called to be the hope for others. We are not alone.

### Sermon Description:

The stories of Elijah and Elisha teach us a great deal about how to have hope in the most difficult times. The passages in 1 Kings 17, 18, and 19 offer particularly important messages for people who feel down and out and at the end of the rope.

In 1 Kings 17, Elijah meets a widow of Zarephath, who takes a leap of faith and offers to Elijah all of her remaining food resources each day, only to have God replenish her food for the next day. It is a hopeful reminder that God gives us just enough to make it, one day at a time.

In 1 Kings 18, Elijah calls his servant to look out into the horizon for any sign of rain, so that the drought might be over. Six times, the servant returns with no report of imminent rain. It is only after the seventh time that the servant sees a rain cloud, the size of a human hand. This story is a reminder that the hope God offers us is something we are called to participate in, not just passively sit back and wish for. We are called to be the hope for someone else.

And in 1 Kings 19, a dejected and demoralized Elijah experiences a fresh sense of God's presence. Not in the ways that God has appeared to him and others in the past—through a wind, an earthquake, and a fire—but through a still, small voice, that reminds him that there are thousands of other servants of God who are by his side. It is a reminder to seek God with openness, to not confine God in a box of preconceived notions, and that no matter what happens, we are not alone.

## Sermon 6

**Title:** A Call to Obedience

**Scripture:** 2 Kings 23:1-14

**Key Word:** Obedience

**Theme:** The Reforms of Josiah

**Main Idea:** We are called to obedience and surrender, just as Jesus surrendered himself in obedience to the cross.

### **Sermon Description:**

Josiah was the sixteenth king of Judah and is considered to be one of the last good, faithful kings of the people of Judah. Under his rule, the ancient scriptures were rediscovered, and he enacted reforms to get people back on the track of obedience and fidelity to God. Those reforms would be temporary, as his successors would allow the people to relapse into their idolatrous ways. But for a while, under Josiah, people were obedient to God.

On Palm Sunday, we remember that Jesus embodied ultimate obedience and surrender to the way of God, the way of love. From his triumphal entry in Jerusalem to the Last Supper, and into his prayer in the garden (where he prays, “Not my will, but yours be done”) and arrest and crucifixion, Jesus shows us the way of commitment to God.

Note: for this Sunday, it is understandable to choose a passage from the gospels as a primary text, and weave in the Bible Year reading as supplemental material.

## **Easter Sunday**

**Title:** He is Risen!

**Scripture:** Primary Text: Easter Gospel; Secondary Text: 1 Chronicles 29:6-20

**Key Word:** Praise

**Theme:** Resurrection

**Main Idea:** God has raised Jesus from the dead. We respond with praise and thanksgiving for all of God's marvelous works.

### **Sermon Description:**

For Easter Sunday, it is important to use one of the Easter gospel texts, typically Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, or John 20. It is likely that many of the attendees of worship that day will not have been part of the Bible Year journey thus far, so it would be difficult to have a full celebration of the resurrection using only the texts from 2 Chronicles.

As a supplemental text, the preacher may choose to use this passage from 1 Chronicles 29:6-20, which contain David's last words to his people prior to the succession of Solomon. David's words recall the works and wonders of God's salvation, and summon people to praise and thanksgiving. It is an appropriate tone and message on a day when we celebrate the power of God in Christ to overcome death, and to raise us to new life.